

REMARKS

Upon review of the Written Opinion dated 12 January 2000, the Authorized Officer has indicated that Claims 1-6, 9-12, 14, 15, and 18-20 lack novelty under PCT Article 33(2) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 5,464,987 to Ihara et al. The Authorized Officer states that Ihara et al. discloses a first fastening element in Fig. 10 including a plurality of extending nanotubes and a second fastening element including a plurality of extending nanotubes whereby the extending nanotubes of each fastening element are mechanically interconnected.

While the Applicants respectfully disagree with the Authorized Officer's interpretation of Ihara et al., Applicants have amended independent claims 1, 9 and 14 in an effort to more clearly define the scope of the invention.

As is clear from a review of Fig. 10 in Ihara et al., the interconnected chain of nanotubes depicted in Ihara et al. requires degradation and reformation of the nanotube chain links in order to arguably accomplish a "fastening element". This degradation involves a destruction of the atomic bonds forming the nanotube to provide sufficient clearance to accomplish a link between the consecutive nanotube chain elements of Ihara et al. In contrast, the fastening elements of the present invention can be connected and disconnected without requiring the above described degradation.

Regarding new Claims 24-43, Applicants have considered the Authorized Officer's notation that Ihara et al. fails to teach an interengaging fastening system wherein at least one of the interconnected or adjoined fastening elements is

selectively deformable. As such, language reflecting this limitation has been included in independent claims 24, 31 and 35 respectively.

Thus, since the claims as currently pending demonstrate both novelty and the requisite inventive steps, Applicant respectfully submits that each of the pending claims should be in a condition for allowance. Upon review of the foregoing, if the Authorized Officer has any questions, he is encouraged to contact the undersigned at his earliest convenience.

Lastly, please note that substitute pages 8-15 have been included herewith for entry into the application.

Respectfully submitted,

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